

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

50 California Street • Suite 2600 • San Francisco, California 94111 • (415) 352-3600 • Fax: (415) 352-3606 • www.bcdc.ca.gov

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TO: All Design Review Board Members

FROM: Will Travis, Executive Director [415/352-3653 travis@bcdc.ca.gov]
Ming Yeung, Coastal Planning Analyst [415/352-3616 mingy@bcdc.ca.gov]

**SUBJECT: Ferry Plaza Parking, Ferry Building Back Plaza, City and County of San Francisco
(First Review)**
(For Board consideration on January 11, 2010)

Project Summary

Applicants. Port of San Francisco and Equity Office.

Project Representatives. Jonathan Stern and Dan Hoddap, Port of San Francisco; Harout Hagopian and Jane Connors, Equity Office; Boris Dramov and Bonnie Fisher, ROMA Design Group.

Site. Ferry Plaza is located on the pile-supported platform, immediately east of the Ferry Building, within the City and County of San Francisco. The Ferry Plaza is bounded by the Ferry Building to the west, the Golden Gate Ferry Terminal to the north, the BART ventilation structure and the former World Trade Club to the east, and the Bay's edge to the south (see Exhibits "Existing Conditions", pp. 1 - 2). The Ferry Plaza is a dedicated public access area required by BCDC permits. Typically, on weekdays, the plaza is occupied by illegally parked cars or trucks loading/unloading into the Ferry Building (see photos, pp. 3 - 4). Seating is available at the southern Bay edge, around the Ghandi statue near the center of the Plaza, and near the Ferry Building. On Saturday mornings, the Ferry Plaza is occupied by the farmers market.

Project Background. Several BCDC permits designate the entire Ferry Plaza area as dedicated public access. Service vehicles are permitted to travel through but not stop or park in the public access area during the day from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Similarly, limited BART and Golden Gate Ferry vehicles are permitted to drive through the Ferry Plaza to access their facilities. When the World Trade Club was in business, cars were illegally valeted and parked on the public plaza during the day, a violation that the BCDC staff remedied through enforcement. With the closure of the World Trade Club and the installation of new gates near the Embarcadero promenade limiting cars from entering into the plaza area, there have been fewer illegally parked cars. Today, the majority of vehicles parked in this area include loading/unloading trucks for the Ferry Building. Although deliveries are limited to certain hours by BCDC's permit, the reality is that these vehicles continue to park in the public plaza throughout the day.

Over the years, the Port of San Francisco and BCDC have actively tried to improve the public access use of the Ferry Plaza. Approaches have included placing large planters throughout the plaza, and putting out moveable chairs to study where the public gathers within the plaza. This study showed that the public tended to gather around certain areas, such as around the Ghandi statue, along the Ferry Building edge, or along the southern Bay edge. Therefore, while the plaza is quite large, its lack of definition discourages public access use of the entire area. According to the applicants, the Ferry



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Plaza has “remained an ill-defined and underutilized space that does not contribute as well as it could to its surrounding uses. Cars are spread out over the plaza, trucks come in and out, and people are not clear as to where they should go and where they can linger. Emergency access routes adjoin the water’s edge along the southern side of the space, which is where most pedestrians tend to gather.” Although the applicants believe the plaza becomes most active and alive during the farmers market on Saturdays, even on these days, the path of movement is not clear, nor are there sufficient places to sit, eat and enjoy views to the Bay. They believe some definition to the space is needed to turn the plaza into a more successful waterfront destination.

The Port of San Francisco and Equity Office, which manages the Ferry Building, has expressed a concern over the lack of parking for Ferry Building retail customers, particularly with the closure of the Pier ½ parking lot. According to the applicants, “the Ferry Building has been plagued by a lack of nearby drop-off and parking areas that would help establish it as an attractive shopping destination.” To offset for the loss of parking from Pier ½, Equity Office has instituted a valet parking service along the south Embarcadero curb in the front of the Ferry Building, with validated and non-validated rates. According to Equity Office, this valet service has attracted primarily restaurant patrons of the Ferry Building or nearby businesses, rather than shoppers. Equity Office would like to provide additional parking for its retail customers at the site. The Port views interim parking as a way to finance public access improvements on the Ferry Plaza.

Proposed Project. The Port of San Francisco and Equity Office are proposing to redesign the Ferry Plaza to improve shared use of the space by cars and the public. The proposal calls for “the restructuring of the space for greater spatial definition and to provide a framework that will foster activity.” According to the applicants, “specific areas will be set aside for pedestrians and others will be more flexible, allowing for a variety of activities to take place,” including parking for up to four years, special events, and farmer’s market use on Saturdays (see Exhibits, pp. 5 - 11). The applicants’ objective is to allow parking for an interim period of four years to help finance the public access improvements on the plaza, create a better environment, add activities and give sufficient time for Ferry Plaza to establish itself as a people-oriented destination. According to the applicants, “ultimately, the improvements will help make parking become superfluous and truly incidental to the success of the place.”

The redesign would include the construction of an approximately 8,360-square-foot wooden deck adjacent to the Ferry Plaza promenade that would be slightly elevated, about 2 to 2½ feet above the adjacent grade. The deck, combined with the Ferry Plaza promenade would create a combined public access area of approximately 12,500 square feet. The new deck, described as a pedestrian plaza, is envisioned as a wooden structure constructed of Brazilian ironwood that would provide a unique vantage point for enjoying the waterfront setting. The edge of the deck would create a continuous seat wall and the steps to the deck could be used for seating and viewing market educational demonstrations and events during farmer’s market days. The deck would include long tables adjacent to the Bay promenade for communal outdoor dining and moveable tables and chairs for more informal gathering and picnicking (see Exhibit “Sections of Plaza Area”, p. 7). The statue of Ghandi would be relocated to the wooden deck as a focal point.

The remaining 30,000 square feet of the Ferry Plaza would provide for multiple uses, including daily valet parking, the Saturday’s farmer’s market, exhibits and special events. The area would be defined by bollards and framed by pedestrian-scale lighting (see Exhibit, p. 9). It is unclear whether public use of the space would be allowed during valet operations.

Valet parking is proposed on the back plaza, 6 days a week, Sunday through Friday, from 7:30 am to 10:00pm, for a period of four years. The revenues generated from parking (approximately \$3 million over four years) would be used to manage and operate the valet service and to pay for the public access improvements at the Ferry Plaza. Parking would be provided for up to 62 cars and would operate similar to the former Pier ½ lot. Directional signage, located along the Embarcadero and elsewhere, would lead customers to a parking attendant at the drop-off and loading area (see Exhibit, “Temporary Parking Concept”, p. 5). Customers would be welcomed to park in any available open

stall, retain their keys and obtain a claim ticket. Once the perimeter stalls reach full capacity, the attendant would drive the customers' vehicle to inside stalls and hold onto the keys. Bollards would define access around the parking area for pedestrians, near the Golden Gate Ferry Ticket Booth and the east side of the Ferry Building (see "Section" Exhibits, p. 8). The applicants are also proposing to install an approximately 800-square-foot bike rental kiosk along the Embarcadero promenade, near the Agriculture Building and possibly a bike valet service on Saturdays, within the center island of the Embarcadero crosswalk.

The applicants were asked to explore the future use and improvements of the Ferry Plaza after parking was removed, to guarantee that the public access use of the space would be improved after parking. The applicants propose the installation of festoon lighting over the remaining plaza area after parking is removed (see Exhibit "Ultimate Plaza Design Concept", p. 12 and photos, pp. 13 – 15). The applicants believe that restructuring the space with an elevated pedestrian plaza and temporary parking will help provide a framework that will foster activity for the long-term. They envision a change in use pattern over the entire plaza area that will continue after parking is removed.

San Francisco Waterfront Special Area Plan Policies – "Free and Accessible Public Access". The *San Francisco Waterfront Special Area Plan* (SAP) states that vehicle circulation in public access areas must "be limited to service and maintenance vehicles necessary to serve the facility and should be concentrated during late night and early morning hours." The SAP requires that public access be provided free of charge to the public, be generally accessible at any time, and emphasize passive recreation and focus its proximity to the Bay and on the views and unique experiences that nearness to the Bay affords. The SAP also requires that "on-pier public access areas...incorporate unique and special amenities that draw the public to them, including cultural expression, (e.g., public art, event programming or unique views)."

BCDC Public Access Design Guidelines. The *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that public access should feel public, be designed so that the user is not intimidated nor is the user's appreciation diminished by structures, or incompatible uses and that there should be visual cues that public access is available for the public's use by using site furnishings, such as benches, trash containers and lighting. The *Public Access Design Guidelines* further state that public access areas should be designed for a wide range of users, should maximize user comfort by designing for weather and day and night use and that each site's historical, cultural and natural attributes provide opportunities for creating projects with a "sense of place" and a unique identity.

Public Access Issues. At this conceptual stage, the project applicants and staff are seeking the Board's advice on the proposal. Specifically, the Board should focus on whether the proposed public access improvements and temporary parking would help improve the public access use of the Ferry Plaza, both in the short- and long-term, or whether the proposed uses would impact physical and visual access to the Bay, in light of the SAP policies described above. The staff requests that the Board consider the following design questions during its review of the project:

1. Should temporary parking be allowed on the Ferry Plaza? Would the car parking conflict with the public access use of the space or does it enhance the public access areas? If it would maintain or enhance public use of the Ferry Plaza, what methods should be used to reduce any potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles?
2. Does the site layout provide usable and inviting public spaces that are oriented to the Bay and adequately separate vehicles and pedestrians?
3. Is there adequate circulation space around the proposed parking lot for pedestrians? Specifically, are there adequate connections that allow for public access from the Ferry Building to the Golden Gate Ferry, the Ferry Plaza promenade, and out to the east apron so that the public is "not intimidated nor is the user's appreciation diminished" by parking operations?

4. Does the proposed siting, massing, and architectural treatments of the elevated wooden deck adequately preserve views to the Bay and maximize the public's enjoyment of the plaza and the waterfront? Is the plaza appropriately designed for the site and for all users, including those requiring ADA access?
5. Are there alternative design treatments or public access improvements that should be considered to offset for the loss of public access resulting from temporary parking and to maximize the public's enjoyment and use of the remaining public access areas?
6. Would the proposed design create a more successful public space when parking is removed in the future? Should more consideration be given to the long-range goals for public access on the Ferry Plaza? Are there other design ideas or treatments that should be considered to ensure the long-term success of the entire Ferry Plaza as a public access area?